

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J.

PRESS

JAN 18 1971

M - 64,485

S - 58,457

## FROM SECRET OUTPOST

# CIA Keeps Eye 'In' Red China

By MICHAEL MORROW

Special to The Press and The Washington Post

© 1971 Dispatch News Service International

VIENTIANE, Laos — United States intelligence operations include the sending of armed Laotian reconnaissance teams into China from northern Laos.

Teams are reported to have gone as far as 200 miles into China, dispatched from a secret CIA outpost 15 minutes' flying time north of the Laotian opium center of Houei Sai.

According to sources close to the Central Intelligence Agency, and confirmed by western diplomatic sources in Vientiane, the CIA is sending out hill tribesmen armed with American weapons, a three-pound radio with a range of 400 miles and equipment to tap Chinese telegraph lines, watch roads and do other types of intelligence gathering.

"There is always a team in China," according to sources close to the CIA.

### VALLEY AIRSTRIP

Staging area for the operation is a small, mountain-valley airstrip called Nam Lien (also known as Nam Yu). The strip, which one Air America pilot describes as "difficult as hell to get into," is surrounded by mountains.

It is serviced by both Air America and Continental Air Service and is also a way-station for opium traders from northern Laos and Burma enroute to drug factories at Houei Sai.

During 1968, five Chinese functionaries caught up in the purges of the cultural revolution defected to a Nam Lien reconnaissance team. They were treated well by the Americans for a time but eventually were turned over to the Royal Laotian government.

According to sources close to the CIA, the five were thrown into a 12-by-12-by-12 foot pit exposed to the elements. They were eventually executed.

Like most CIA operations in Laos, the one out of Nam Lien is directed from a headquarters at Udorn Air Base in northeastern Thailand. There are several

Americans at Nam Lien, however, including CIA and military intelligence personnel. Sources close to the CIA report the number has increased recently from 4 to more than 10.

In addition to activities inside China, the Nam Lien Americans also help direct a joint operation of "SGU" (Special Guerrilla Units) and the Thai army at Xieng Lom south of Houei Sai on the Lao-Thai border.

They also run intelligence gathering missions, on a road being built by the Chinese government (under an agreement reached with the new defunct coalition government of Laos) in the same vicinity.

Until mid-September of last year, the Nam Lien operation was headed by a tough-and-tumble veteran guerrilla organizer named Anthony (Tony) Poe. Poe is a legendary figure in Laos known best for his dislike of journalists, disregard for orders and radio codes, capacity for Lao whisky and expertise at clandestine guerrilla operations.

Poe was removed almost immediately after an article last September by Dispatch News Service International on the Nam Lien operations, ostensibly because the article "blew his cover."

According to sources close to the CIA, however, this reason was an excuse used by the American Embassy here to get rid of Poe, whose dashing style has been a source of long-term friction with members of the American mission in Laos, in-

cluding Ambassador McMurtrie Godley.

The September story was reportedly a major concern of CIA Director Richard Helms when he visited Laos in the fall. Helms was upset that there might be a leak within the CIA in Laos, sources close to the CIA report.

Whether by design or coincidence, Vince Shields, in charge of CIA operation at Long Cheng on the edge of the Plain of Jars North of Vientiane, and Patrick Devlin, station chief for the CIA in Vientiane, have both been transferred.

As for the missions into China, however, sources close to the CIA and western diplomatic sources both report that to their knowledge they continue.

Since leaving Nam Lien, Poe has spent most of his time at Udorn Air Base, although one source reports Poe continues to do "odd jobs" on the Thai-Cambodian border. Those who know him say he is unhappy away from Nam Lien.

Poe is an ex-marine noncommissioned officer, wounded at Iwo Jima, who remained in Asia after World War II. In the 1950s he helped organize CIA-trained Tibetan insurgents, escorting them to Colorado for training and going back with them into Tibet.

Later he worked in the Thai-Cambodian border area with the Khmer Serei, anti-Sihanouk guerrillas receiving assistance from the CIA, and other parts of Thailand. He has been in and out of Laos since before the Geneva accords of 1962 and was one of the first Americans involved in arming and training paramilitary groups in Laos.

Poe is considered stubborn and brusque, sometimes going into fits of anger over the radio, his lifeline with the outside world. He is said to prefer working with hill tribes to working with Americans and looks down on most American operations because of their heavy reliance on American personnel.